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BOOKS

In the following article, we will take a look at some books that have—or *claim* to have—Bible-related information. This in no way is intended to place any of them on a level with the Bible itself. But, sometimes, information that has been handed down provides worthwhile *background* about the people and places in which the Bible was written.

The Bible itself mentions certain other books, even though they are not part of the Bible: *Wars of the Lord* (Num. 21:14), *Jasher* (Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18), *Nathan* (1 Chron. 29:29), *Gad* (1 Chron. 29:29), *Shemaiah the Prophet* (2 Chron. 12:15), *Iddo the Seer* (2 Chron. 12:15), *Jehu* (2 Chron. 20:34), and *Enoch* (Jude 14,15).

We have the *four gospels*—by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But there were apparently others who wrote about the life of Christ, for Luke says that “many” had provided such accounts (Luke 1:1-3).

Consider this: Paul quoted Jesus as saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). There is no reason to doubt that Jesus said these words, but they are not found in any of the gospel accounts. It could be that Paul was quoting from some other writings that were then available.

In the book of Jude, we are told that “Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” (Jude 1:9). This quotation appears nowhere in the Old Testament. According to several of the early Christian fathers, including Clement of Alexandria and Origen, this was from *The Assumption of Moses*, a Jewish work of which only fragments remain today.

Paul mentioned the names of the Egyptian magicians as “Jannes and Jambres who withstood Moses” (2 Tim. 3:8). These names never appear in the Old Testament, but were mentioned in Jewish history books with which Paul was familiar.

The point is: even the inspired writers of the New Testament did not hesitate to include information from valid history that had been handed down.

While in Athens, seeing the city given over to idolatry, Paul pointed out that God made the world and everything in it; consequently, he is greater than any temple or idol made with men’s hands. He’s *everywhere*—“for in him we live and move and have our being, *as also some of your own poets have said*” (Acts 17:28). This shows that Paul was familiar with Greek poetry. One of those poets was Aratus, a worshipper of Jove, who had lived about three centuries before.

Paul’s Lord was *Jesus*, of course—not *Jove*. But to establish credibility and find some common ground with the Greeks, he did not hesitate to refer to points of agreement in *their* poetry. He then went on to lead them into a saving knowledge of the true God, the One who fills the universe. **He’s everywhere!**

The words of a lovely song with this title come to mind :

**Through storms of fear and doubt I sailed
 My eyes were blinded by a veil
 I saw no beauty anywhere in anything.**

**Then I drew near the Cross where He
 In shame and sorrow died for me**

My veil was lifted and he taught my heart to sing!

I see him in a baby’s smile

I hear him in the wind that sighs

He loves me and I know not why,

He’s everywhere!

He calls me from a world of care,

I seek Him and I find Him there.

He’s in my heart I feel Him there,

He’s everywhere!

A sizeable portion of the world is populated by Muslims—estimated as high as 1.9 billion in number—whose sacred book is the *Koran* (*Quran*). It may come as a surprise to some that the *Koran* not only mentions many of the same people the Bible does—Adam, Cain, Abel, Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and Solomon—it also mentions JESUS! And—here is another *surprise*—it even says, as does the Bible, that *Mary conceived Jesus without a human father!*

Most do not realize that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is mentioned *more often* in the *Koran* than in the Bible. In the Bible she is mentioned by name 19 times and in a few other places, not by name, but simply as the mother of Jesus. But in the *Koran* she is referred to **seventy** times! And, strangely, she is the **ONLY** woman mentioned by name in the *Koran*!

In the Bible, two books are named after women: Esther and Ruth. But there is no book of Mary. We do not have Matthew, Mark, and Mary. But *Mary* is the name of a book in the *Koran*! Of the 114 books (called surahs or chapters) the 19th is titled MARY. It is from this portion that we read:

“Gabriel...appeared unto her...She said, I fly for refuge unto the merciful God, that he may defend me from you...He answered, Verily I am the messenger of the Lord....She said, How shall I have a son, seeing a man has not touched me, and I am no harlot? Gabriel replied, So shall it be: thy Lord saith, This is easy with me....Wherefore she conceived him, and she retired aside with him in her womb to a distant place....This was Jesus, the son of Mary; the Word of truth....”

Though the Muslim people acknowledge the miracle by which Mary gave birth to Jesus, sadly, they do not know or recognize him as Lord and Savior, only a prophet.

Both books—the Bible and the *Koran*—tell about the Flood, Noah, and the Ark.

Some Christian organizations have spent millions of dollars in their attempts to find the remains of the Ark, possibly frozen in ice on Mount Ararat. But even the Institute for Creation Research has acknowledged that despite all the expeditions and claims, Noah’s Ark has *not* been found and is unlikely to be found.

Those who have searched for the Ark have had good intentions. They feel this remarkable discovery would, once and for all, *prove* the Bible is true. But that, *in itself*, would not. The Muslim *Koran* also tells about Noah’s Ark. We would not take this as proof that every thing in the *Koran* is true.

Meanwhile, multitudes have believed the Bible, have received Jesus Christ as their Lord, by *faith*—totally separate from whether Noah’s Ark is ever discovered or not. They have made HIM their “Ark” of safety through the storms of life.

It has sometimes been taught that it took Noah **120 years** to build the Ark. The Bible does not say this. A period of 120 years is mentioned in Genesis 6:3: “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever...his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.” These words implied that judgment was coming, but nothing was said about a flood or building the Ark *at this time*.

One hundred and twenty years before the flood, Noah would have been 480 years old (for he was 600 at the time of the flood—Genesis 7:11). Noah’s sons were not born until he was 500 (Gen. 5:32). It was not until quite some time *after* this that Noah was told to build the Ark, for when he was told to do so, his sons had grown up and married. “Make yourself an ark...I am bringing a flood of waters...you shall go into the ark—you, your sons, your wife, *and your sons’ wives* with you” (Gen. 6:14-18).

Since it is definitely implied that Noah’s sons were grown and married when he was instructed to build the Ark, and considering the ages of Noah and his sons, it seems clear that he was *not* working on the Ark for 120 years.

How I learned this came about while I was holding meetings in Porterville, California, many years ago. I met a wonderful, elderly Christian man who shared these verses about Noah’s sons, their ages, etc. Because he was not well educated, when he spoke of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, he struggled to pronounce “Japheth” (sounded more like “Jehoshaphat”). But *he* knew something *I* didn’t—I learned from him that it did not take Noah 120 years to build the Ark!

The book of *Jasher* says it took 5 years (*Jasher* 5:34), which may or may not be correct.

Details in the Bible about the Ethiopian wife of Moses are sketchy, being limited to the incident when Miriam and Aaron—his sister and brother—criticized him “because of the **Ethiopian** woman whom he had married” (Num. 12:1). Was their criticism based on the dark color of her skin (cf. Jer. 13:23) or for some other reason? We don’t know.

But Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, provided this account:

Moses, as the general of the Egyptian army, “came upon the Ethiopians before they expected him; and, joining battle with them, he beat them, and deprived them of the hopes they had of success against the Egyptians, and went on in overthrowing their cities.”

When he sought to overthrow Saba, the Royal City, the king’s daughter, Tharbis, “happened to see Moses as he led the army near the walls, and fought with great courage...she fell deeply in love with him; and...sent to him the most faithful of all her servants to discourse with him about their marriage.

“He thereupon accepted the offer, on condition she would procure the delivering up of the city...and that when he had once taken possession of the city, he would not break his oath to her. No sooner was the agreement made, but it took effect immediately; and when Moses had cut off the Ethiopians, he gave thanks to God, and consummated his marriage, and led the Egyptians back to their own land” (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 2, 10:2).

Though the Old Testament does not tell of Moses being a military general during his years in Egypt, Stephen could have referred to this when he spoke of Moses being mighty in *deeds* (Acts 7:22). The Josephus account may be more fiction than fact, but it was regarded as authentic history by some of the early church fathers.

Having been “mighty in deeds” as an Egyptian leader, at age 40 Moses wanted to help his own people, the Hebrews. “*For* he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not” (Acts 7:25). In the process, seeing an Egyptian taskmaster brutally beating a Hebrew slave, he killed him and buried him in the sand.

Oppression of Hebrew slaves was evidently widespread. Why did *this* particular man enflame Moses so much? The Bible does not explain this, but according to the book of *Jasher*—and in this case it may reflect valid history—the Egyptian had raped the slave’s wife:

“And when the man who was beaten saw Moses he ran to him for help...and he said to him....This Egyptian came to my house in the night, bound me, and came to my wife in my presence, and now he seeks to take my life away. And when Moses heard this wicked thing, his anger was kindled against the Egyptian, and he turned this way and the other, and when he saw there was no man there he smote the Egyptian and hid him in the sand” (*Jasher* 71:2,3).

Over the centuries there have been differences among Christians regarding water baptism, one of which has to do with the proper “formula.” Some baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” according to Matthew 28:19. Others believe baptism should be “in the name of Jesus Christ” according to Acts 2:38.

Some readers will recognize the name Finis Jennings Dake (1902–1987) who was best-known for his *Dake’s Annotated Bible*. Glancing just now at my copy, I would estimate it has (not hundreds) but *thousands* of notes. Some of these notes are quite good, others may be rightly questioned. But it is obvious he put a lot of labor and study into the publication of this annotated Bible.

Years ago while I was holding meetings at a church in Georgia, the pastor told me this story about going to hear Finis Dake speak in Atlanta:

He and a friend—both were young men who believed Acts 2:38 was the correct formula for baptism—went to the meeting. They knew it was Dake’s custom to speak on a biblical subject and then open things up for questions. So it would not look like they were together, they purposely did not sit together. When question and answer time came, one of them asked:

“Brother Dake, you teach that Bible doctrine should not be based on one verse in isolation; that *all* essential doctrines will always be based on one or more *supporting* scriptures, so that ‘in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.’” [2 Cor. 13:1, etc.]. Dake agreed.

With this, the other young man (sitting at a different place in the audience), stood and said: “I have a question then—what about Matthew 28:19, baptizing ‘in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost’? What is the supporting verse for this?” That was awkward for Brother Dake in that he could not come up with any supporting verse.

The man who told me about this incident, looking back, felt that while they made their intended point, it was somewhat childish the way they went about it.

It will not be my purpose here to enlarge on issues about “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” versus “in the name of Jesus Christ” as a baptismal formula, except to say: if we use *preponderance of evidence* as

a guide, Matthew 28:19 (one verse) is far outnumbered by verses that state or imply that water baptism was in the name of Jesus Christ: Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; 1 Cor. 1:13; Col. 3:17.

My understanding is that Mormons baptize using the titles: “In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Section 20, *Doctrine and Covenants*. But, interestingly, notice this passage in *The Book of Mormon*:

“And it came to pass that after he had ascended into heaven...that the disciples whom Jesus had chosen began from that time forth to baptize and teach as many as did come unto them; and as many as were **baptized in the name of Jesus** were filled with the Holy Ghost...and they who were **baptized in the name of Jesus** were called the church of Christ” (3 *Nephi* 26:15, 17, 21).

Just think—if this passage had been in the *Bible*, some groups that have put on billboards, “Have you obeyed Acts 2:38?” might put, “Have you obeyed 3 *Nephi* 26:17?”!

Following his earlier life as a Christian minister, Lloyd C. Douglas (1877-1951) became best-known as the author of the book (and later the movie) *The Robe*. He did not claim to have any divine revelation about what happened to the robe of Christ (mentioned in John 19:23), but simply wrote a fictional story about what might have happened.

In somewhat the same way, centuries ago as the Christian faith spread, there were some who took facts about Jesus, but then added their *own* imaginary ideas. One such book, *Infancy*, (Chapters 6 and 7) tells about a girl with leprosy who washed with water in which the baby Jesus had been bathed, her leprosy was healed and, consequently, she traveled with Joseph and Mary as a servant.

In one place they were invited to stay with some people who had a donkey in their house, covered with silk, whom certain women kissed and fed. They said this was their brother who had been turned into a donkey by a jealous witch. So Mary took the baby Jesus and put him upon the back of the donkey, spoke certain words, and the donkey was turned again into a handsome young man who, as fate would have it, married the young girl who had traveled with Joseph and Mary!

In Chapter 15 when Jesus was seven, he and children in their neighborhood made birds and other animals from clay. Each boasted of his work. But the ones Jesus made, at his command, came to life so that *his* animals walked and the birds *he* made flew away! When this was told, parents were afraid to have their children play with Jesus, thinking he was a sorcerer.

Chapter 16 is *amusing*: Joseph, we are told, “was not very skillful at his carpenter’s trade.” In making gates, milk pails, or boxes, sometimes he would not cut boards the right length. But by taking Jesus along he had no problem, for the young boy would simply perform miracles making the boards shorter or longer as needed!

We do not doubt that Jesus, as a boy, could have performed miracles, had this been God’s plan. But the Bible itself

seems to rule this out. There is the definite implication that it was not until after his baptism and anointing with the Holy Spirit at age 30 that his miracle ministry began (Luke 3:21-23; 4:16-18; Acts 10:38; John 2:11).

Christians who hold the King James ONLY teaching may use statements like: “WE use the King James Version of 1611.” They may not know, or choose not to mention, that this version (along with all English translations before it) included the *Apocrypha*.

One of the books in the *Apocrypha* is titled *Tobit* which tells about a woman who married seven times and each husband died on the wedding night. Consequently, when Tobit’s son, Tobias, was about to marry her, he was fearful.

“Then the young man said unto the angel, Brother Azarias, I have heard that this maid hath been given to seven men, and they all perished in the bride-chamber....I am afraid, lest I go in and die, even as those before me: for a demon loveth her....But the angel said...When thou shalt come into the bride-chamber, thou shalt take the ashes of incense, and shalt lay upon them some of the heart and liver of the fish, and shalt make a smoke therewith: and the devil shall smell it, and flee away” (*Tobit* 6:13-17). Following these instructions, and with much prayer, the marriage was consummated, the life of Tobias was spared, and a happy marriage followed.

Another book in the *Apocrypha*, titled *Susanna*, is named after a beautiful woman who was married to a rich man named Joakim. Their property included a lovely garden area where one day, supposing no one was around, “she was desirous to wash herself in the garden for it was hot.” But she was not alone, for two voyeuristic old men who had been appointed judges among the Jews, “hid themselves and watched her.” Then they ran to her and said: “Behold, the garden doors are shut, that no man can see us, and we are in love with you; therefore consent unto us, and lie with us” (*Susanna* 1:20).

When she refused, they made up a story—that they had seen her commit adultery with a young man. Being judges, their accusation carried with it the death penalty! But as “she was led away to be put to death, God raised up the holy spirit of a youth, whose name was Daniel” (verse 45).

He suggested that each judge be questioned *separately*—questions like what kind of tree they were under when they saw Susanna with the young man. When their answers did not agree, it was evident they had made up the story. Susanna’s life was spared and the corrupt judges were put to death.

The book *Bel and the Dragon* in the *Apocrypha* also mentions Daniel. The Babylonian king asked him why he did not worship the god Bel. Daniel replied that he worshipped the living God, not an idol made with men’s hands. But Bel, it was claimed, was a living God, for food that was placed in his temple was eaten each night with all the doors being locked. By secretly scattering ashes on the floor of Bel’s temple, Daniel proved—by the *footprints* of priests—that through a trap door *they* entered and ate the food, not Bel. When the king realized this, he had the priests put to death and gave Daniel permission to destroy the idol Bel and his temple.

It appears to me that most of the books in the *Apocrypha* have very little spiritual value. But the last two books, *First and Second Maccabees*, are widely recognized as a valid historical account during the period between Malachi and Matthew (called the “intertestamental period”). We read about the tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes who killed many of the Jews and stopped their worship. He desecrated the Jerusalem temple, placed prostitutes within its walls and poured the blood of pigs over the furnishings of the holy place. Finally, though, with the odds against them, the Jewish people rose up and drove out the enemy and again dedicated the temple to the worship of God. The annual Feast of Dedication, which was attended by Jesus, commemorates this event (John 10:22).

“Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:12, 13). —RW



Rock formations and native palm trees, Andreas Canyon, Palm Springs, California.

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